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CREACIÓN, INVESTIGACIÓN,
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STORY SYSTEMS THE POTENTIAL OF TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AS MATERIAL EMBODIMENT OF A COLLECTIVE ENACTMENT OF PLACE AND IDENTITY

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Abstract: The ideas raised in this chapter initially emerged over the course of conceiving and creating the acclaimed multi-year, transmedia Big Stories, Small Towns participatory documentary project (bigstories.com.au). The project has facilitated the telling, recording, archiving and dissemination of over 500 intimate auto/biographical narratives across thirteen towns in six countries to over 1 million viewers. The project was initiated in 2008 with the belief that every community has a living memory and collective identity woven together from a thousand stories. Recognising the intrinsic value of telling and documenting stories – with the active involvement of participants using a variety of media and technologies – reveals emergent and complex processes. The inter-twined combination of context, process, form and relationships heightened through the use of technology is a complex adaptive system. While a level of interconnectivity has always underpinned storytelling within communities, shifting global dynamics and new mediums allow for an alternative examination of multi-layered communities and the complex relations between people, social backgrounds, technology/ media and place. This represents a fundamental shift away from a centralised vision of storymaking (i.e. author/documenter-centric). Thus, this chapter moves attention from the rhetoric of texts to practices of community organisation and technological and embodied material relations, both of which aspire to produce a collectively enacted sense of place and identity.

Keywords: transmedia, participatory media, interactive documentary, community media

Resumen: Las ideas planteadas en este capítulo surgieron inicialmente en el transcurso de la concepción y creación del aclamado proyecto transmedial multianual: Big Stories, Small Towns participatory documentary project (bigstories.com.au). El proyecto ha facilitado la narración, grabación, archivo y difusión de más de 500 narrativas íntimas de autobiográficas en trece ciudades de seis países y más de un millón de espectadores. El proyecto se inició en 2008 con la creencia de que cada comunidad tiene un recuerdo vivo y una identidad colectiva tejida a partir de cientos de historias. Reconocer el valor intrínseco de contar y documentar historias, con la participación activa de los participantes y utilizando una variedad de medios y tecnologías, revela procesos emergentes y complejos. La combinación entrelazada de contexto, proceso, forma y relaciones aumentada a través del uso de la tecnología es un sistema adaptativo complejo. Mientras que un nivel de interconectividad siempre ha sustentado la narración dentro de las comunidades, la dinámica global cambiante y los nuevos medios permiten un examen alternativo de las comunidades a varios niveles y las relaciones complejas entre personas, antecedentes sociales, tecnología/medios y lugar. Esto representa un cambio fundamental desde una visión centralizada de la creación de historias (es decir, centrada en el autor / documentalista). Por lo tanto, este capítulo desvía la atención de la retórica de los textos a las prácticas de organización comunitaria y las relaciones materiales tecnológicas incorporadas, que aspiran a producir un sentido de lugar e identidad colectivamente representado.

Palabras claves: transmedia, medios participativos, documental interactivo, medios comunitarios

INTRODUCTION – BIG STORIES, SMALL TOWNS

In 2008 I initiated the *Big Stories, Small Towns* project – a transmedia, participatory documentary project that has, as of 2017, facilitated the telling, recording, archiving and dissemination of over 400 intimate auto/biographical narratives across fourteen towns in six countries to over 1 million viewers. *Big Stories* shows these local stories and expressions in a variety of situations from television and radio broadcast to art galleries and local archives. Stories are also brought to a global forum via the bigstories.com.au website. This variance in dissemination of materials reflects other transmedia projects where, as Edmond (2015: 1575) notes, “physical and mediated spaces increasingly overlap.” Urrichio (2008: 111) observes this calls attention to the larger ordering strategies that give public memory its contours and offers a way to move beyond what is seen in order to consider a way of seeing or being in the world. This notion of transmedia is comprised of overlapping and variable spaces. In these spaces, opportunities are enabled for shaping public memory and collective identity. This offers a way to move beyond what is seen in order to consider a way of seeing and being in the world.

The *Big Stories* project was driven by my interest in working with communities to produce creative works central to their lives and relevant to the world that may also facilitate communal transformation. In this project, there is an attempt to collectively represent various human experiences, and ultimately my own creative voice through the personal expressions of myriad participants. A foundational assumption from the outset of the *Big Stories* project has been that the collective identity and living memory of a community is woven together from thousands of stories. The stories we tell others and ourselves are how we imagine and re-imagine our world as well as our selves (Potter, 2014: 2). Recognising the intrinsic value of telling and documenting stories, with the active involvement of participants using a variety of media and technologies, reveals an inter-twined combination of context, process, form and relationships. This combination, heightened through the use of technology, is essentially a complex adaptive system. While interconnectivity has always underpinned storytelling within communities, shifting global dynamics and new mediums allow for an alternative examination of multi-layered communities and the complex relations between people, social backgrounds, technology/ media and place. This represents a shift away from a centralised vision of storymaking

defined by a single author or documenter. Instead the focus shifts to a collectivised storytelling practice. Thus, this chapter moves attention from the rhetoric of stories as texts to be read, toward practices of community organisation. Stories from the project can be understood as the material and technological embodiment of communal relations and organisation, which aspire to produce a collectively enacted sense of place and identity.

The *Big Stories* project is an idea that emerges from its doing. It is an evolving and process-led work that seeks to describe a complex reality of multi-layered community and creating complex relations between people, social backgrounds, technology and place and filmmakers and participants. The project is detailed in Potter (2014) and the strategies, inspirations and assumptions that underpin the project are further defined (Potter, 2014: 2-3). To briefly offer key frameworks for this chapter, the process, key roles and principles of the *Big Stories* project are highlighted.

Big Stories is based around filmmakers living in residence in a town producing films and undertaking training and media literacy development in the community. Filmmakers continue to consult with communities and participants during production, post-production and through to distribution (this includes the right to request the removal of content from the website). This sustained consultation fosters a mutual respect and trust between participants and the filmmakers. This process was designed with the understanding that putting the relationship with communities, and thus participants, before all other relationships – including those of funders – has the potential to be more reflexive, sophisticated and ethical than previous approaches.

My roles in the *Big Stories* project are multi-faceted. I am creative director of the project, setting the overall context for the project, one of two producers sharing the role of resource gathering, partnerships, production and delivery and a filmmaker in residence. The residencies are selected based on a variety of location specific factors, but a key element is a form of local engagement with the idea of a participatory, collective and storytelling focussed process. For example, in Strathewen, Victoria, Australia the project was identified by a local group – the Strathewen Community Renewal Association – as a possible mechanism to facilitate a community-led storytelling program that could support local people in dealing with the trauma associated with the Black Saturday fires that had ravaged the town. In Bongkud-Namaus, Sabah, Malaysia,

Sabahan filmmaker Nadira Ilana sought to re-engage with her Dusun heritage. In Maumere, Flores, Indonesia, Javanese filmmaker Dodid Wijanarko and Flores based social entrepreneur Alofonsa Horeng saw an opportunity to share stories of Flores culture and the Lepo Lorun weaving collectives from the perspectives of local residents. In Potter (2014) I observe that in other sites such as Murray Bridge and Raukkan in South Australia and Banlung in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia community members saw the project as an opportunity to create a digital archive of memory and experience. Other outcomes described by participants across various sites including in Port Augusta, South Australia, include learning new skills and opportunities to reflect on community in a new way (Potter, 2014).



Figure 1: Still images from *Big Stories, Small Towns* residencies 2008 - 2015

To provide consistency, I oversaw management of the process, the professional team, and community and stakeholder management across all locations. To achieve the diverse collaborative, participatory and process driven outcomes that had been articulated as core principles in early proposals for the project (see Potter, 2014: 296 – 300), a re-visioning of the production personnel delivering the documentary project was necessary. The guiding principles of the

project were defined in a briefing document (see: Potter, 2014: 340) provided to key community partners, funders and filmmakers in residence as follows:

- *The community is our key partner – work closely with them, and respect each other's expertise and independence.*
- *Work through ethics, privacy and consent with the community and adapt accordingly.*
- *Encourage local content production through training, mentoring, community screenings, exhibitions and ongoing support.*
- *Make beautiful, inspiring, insightful and engaging stories with the community. However, it's not PR, we are not making commercials for local initiatives.*
- *Track the process and results and spend time to share what has been learnt with multiple communities in many ways – online, in the community and across different media.*
- *Use the process and stories as a catalyst for discussion, reflection and inspiration.*

The addition of online and interactive elements to a project requires further consideration around the roles of production. Skills and expectations of facilitators vary from the production of most documentaries. The role of the filmmakers in residence would come to encompass many functions: research, mediation, teaching, activism and extensive, diverse community engagement, as well as multi-skilling on various production and post-production tasks, including filming, recording sound, taking photos and editing. In direct support of the filmmakers were the web production team – an online producer, designers and developers as well as the production team that would normally have some role in a linear documentary – video editors, sound technicians, musicians and administration support.

TRANSMEDIA DOCUMENTARY

As noted in Potter (2017: 3), with the emergence of new technologies and forms of media and communication, contemporary documentary makers are actively re-thinking the documentary project. Cizek (in Potter, 2014: 33) and Nash (2012: 196) observe that these projects are often consciously framed as

transmedia and positioned as documentary remediated for an online age, moving fluidly across mediums.

Using the word transmedia to describe the practice of creating a system or a world of many stories, in many forms, spanning many media is a relatively recent development, however the actual practice of creating story systems or story worlds pre-dates recent technological developments such as the world wide web and digital production technologies. For example, Swallow (2013) offers a somewhat arbitrary origin story of transmedia with Samuel Richardson's work from 1740 entitled *Pamela*. In what is often taken as a foundational definition from Henry Jenkins' (2006: 257) *Convergence Culture*, transmedia is defined as a complex world and a narrative system. Jenkins (2001) originally invoked the term 'transmedia' to note, "for all the talk about convergence, multiple media would never coalesce into one supermedium." Jenkins also observed that transmedia could foster a new participatory folk culture by giving "average people" access to creative tools, potentially giving rise to a digital renaissance. Theorising from a Western, neo-liberal cultural and theoretical perspective, Jenkins makes, and has continued to make, sweeping statements around the scale of transformation - claiming this will "affect all aspects of all our lives". (See Jenkins: 2006; 2007) Understanding complex transmedia story systems within a continuum of historical transmedia practices is important in order to both maintain perspective on current practices and to potentially work to achieve the global participatory potential of folk media that Jenkins and many other theorists and practitioners, including myself, idealise. As Jenkins (2001) goes on to note - the contradictory forces of new media and technology have been promoting both convergence and divergence in many ways, "pushing both toward cultural diversity and toward homogenization, toward commercialization and toward grassroots cultural production".

At this stage, I would like to reinforce a few key points. Firstly - an origin point of transmedia practices cannot necessarily be located within a limited lens of recent technological developments. Swallow (2013) might locate the 18th century work *Pamela* as a point of transmedia origin however, during the fragmentation of media that occurred throughout the 20th Century practitioners increasingly began to experiment with moving their works to span many media and the term 'transmedia' has become more prevalent from the early 2000s. While I may describe Swallow's nearly 300 year old point of origin story of transmedia as an 'arbitrary' designation, it is nonetheless important to take

a historical perspective. A historical perspective moves attention beyond a technologically deterministic approach and instead situates transmedia practices within longer collaborative lineages of mediamaking, of participatory production and of storytelling. There are historical precedents to transmedia practices that pre-date internet and digital technologies commonly associated with this work. For example in the field of documentary I identify the work of Jean Rouch from the late 1940s and the National Film Board of Canada's (NFB) *Fogo Process* from 1967 as two key points in shaping collaborative, inter-disciplinary and trans-media approaches (Potter, 2014: 22-38). The influences of these works are felt in a number of ways. There is the work of reconciling the aims of institutions, community, participants and filmmakers. There is the historically important reconceptualisation of how documentary and media can be used for community benefit. There is the community engagement, specifically in the creation of particular community roles and there are numerous stylistic approaches that have been influential and there are the filmmakers' reflections on their processes as a whole illuminating a reflective and critical practice as detailed in Potter (2014: 19-35).

Secondly, a participatory 'folk' culture that enables everyday people everyday access to opportunities for creative expression and mediation is key trait of transmedia cultural practices that is both significant and contradictory. Transmedia encompasses both homogenisation and capitalisation of media expression and experience, and simultaneously offers the potential for extraordinary diversity. Transmedia moves toward limited commercialisation and unprecedented opportunities for grassroots production while at the same time enabling new mechanisms for corporate enclosure. In terms of corporate enclosure, for example, Fuchs (2011) observes "cultural expressions of Internet users are strongly mediated by corporate platforms owned by Facebook, Google and others". The same has been said for a wide range of hardware and software developers. Recently, Sullivan (2016: 66) identified a variety of corporate practices described as "artificial scarcity"...

such as paywalls, search engine traffic redirection, application programming interfaces (APIs), and other software tools (that) are increasingly shaping our experiences with audiovisual media. These technological controls allow corporations to restrict access to media content, thereby enabling differential pricing models and expanded policing of digital copyright.

Sullivan also points out Daubs and Manzerolle (in Sullivan, 2016: 57) have argued that online cultural production comprises a form of “cognitive capitalism” wherein the tools and raw materials of production (software code and APIs) are provided by merchant capital (such as Apple and Google) to “harness and articulate the capacities of immaterial labor(ers). The latter includes coders and app developers, but also the more general category of prosumers”. (in Sullivan, 2016: 67). Within the walled gardens of online platforms, and even the source code that constitutes many websites, communities are not only dependent on commodities produced for them, they also become economic resources. As Lewis (2010) observes, “if you’re not paying for it, you’re not the customer; you’re the product being sold”.

Hay and Couldry (2011: 478) note that from the late 1980s increasingly individualised engagements with media were becoming instrumental to the ‘mass customized’ economies and lifestyle programming of TV and media culture, illustrating a pattern that pre-dates broad uptake of networked computers and use of the worldwide web. Although, as Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2014) report, this individualised engagement with media has clearly been amplified through online platforms. Hay and Couldry (2011: 482) note that,

it is the complex situatedness and embeddedness of the mediation of liberalism and democracy from which ‘convergence studies’ of media, culture and power should begin. From that starting-point, we may be better placed to reflect on the undoubtedly important intersection between many waves, not just one wave, of ‘new’ media (transnational satellite TV, mobile phones, the world-wide web, social media) and the successful and failed political mobilizations that have attracted global attention in recent years.

Hay and Couldry’s insistence on a broad, historical perspective (‘many waves’) is useful in expanding both the timeframe in which we view transmedia, as well as the theoretical lens, seeing this movement not simply as a increased mediatisation of the world, but from diverse perspectives, such as culture centred approach. Thus, it is also necessary here to take some issue with Jenkins’ (2001) statement that multiple, convergent media will never coalesce into one super-medium.

To relate Jenkins’ statement back to a more media studies focus, Benkler (2006: 212) observes that the internet, “fundamentally altered the capacity of individuals, acting alone or with others, to be active participants in the public

sphere as opposed to its passive readers, listeners or viewers". This has enabled representations of multiple and conflicting points of view, where hundreds of thousands of competing perspectives can be linked together. The resulting landscape, that emerges from the internet and diffuses into the physical world constituted of competing sets of meaning, symbols, icons, images and language is conceptualised by Appadurai (2000: 33) as the mediascape. This mediascape has collapsed old and new media, transforming the arena of public opinion and agency. It is, in its very definition, a super-medium. This trans-mediascape is a complex system, allowing for potential engagement in a multiplicity of actions and reflections. Artefacts of transmedia production cannot be studied as something fixed, but need to be addressed through the complex series of relations that form them and are formed by them. This is an inflected and subjective process of mediating and communicating meaning, both in the making and viewing. This process recalls Hall's ([1973] 1980) model of encoding and decoding, initially conceived in relation to television, but which has been applied in almost any setting where there is an audience, viewer or user of a form of media, as seen in Hay and Couldry (2011) (also see: Shaw, 2017). Bodker (2016) in re-situating Hall's model in relation to the circulation of journalism and current affairs in the digital landscape quotes Gurevitch and Scannell's (2003: 232) assertion that Hall's text has been canonised and is "ritually invoked" rather than "engaged with and argued over, contended and challenged". Shaw (2017: 8), however, reinforces that cultural studies approaches to media scholarship are of particular importance at moments of crisis within the humanities – and as outlined in Potter (2014), I believe we are at a critical juncture at this moment.

ENCODING | DECODING TRANSMEDIA

Hall's model of encoding | decoding is a non-linear model of communication. Hall understands that when someone creates something they 'encode' it – they build on pre-existing knowledge, their relationship to the thing, production or person and the technical infrastructure such as the media through which they receive it. The process of encoding is something a creator does. Decoding is something a viewer does. Both encoding and decoding are not a passive or linear process and, as can be seen in *Figure 1*, both take place through a complex series of frameworks, relations and structures. Shaw (2017: 593) notes that Hall's model offers a semiotic framework and extends media and communication studies beyond earlier stimulus-response behaviourist models. However, many

theorists, such as Shaw, choose to focus on the 'decoding' side of the equation - perhaps a legacy of the media effects tradition¹. Instead, Hall's model is, as Hay and Couldry (2011) observe, a complication of the view that media power resided mostly in State and commercial media institutions.

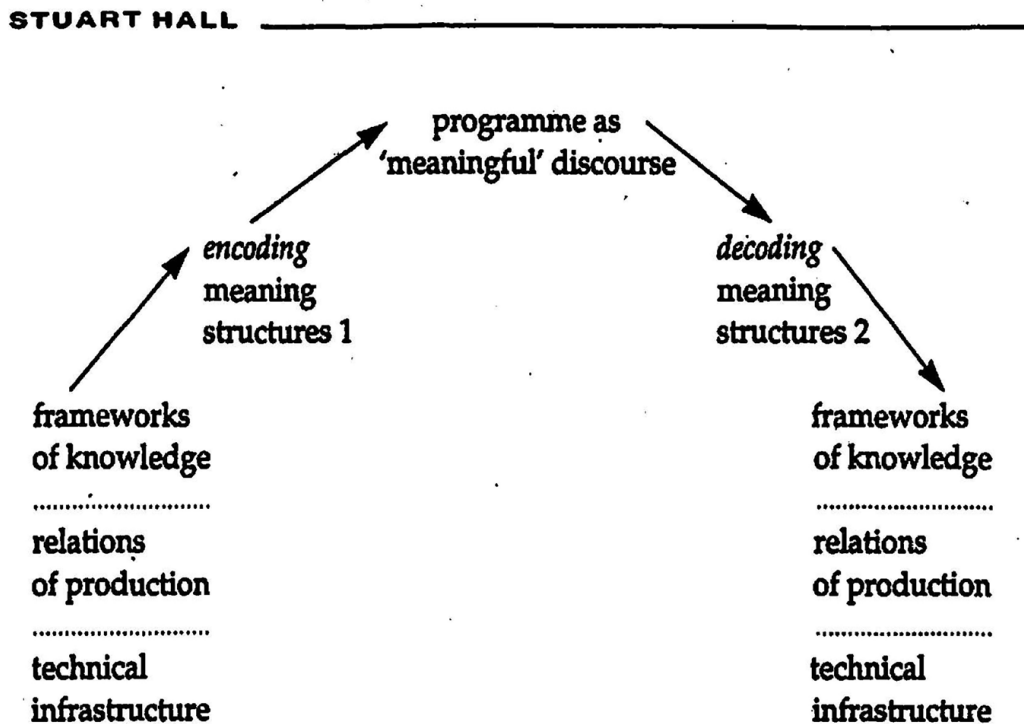


Figure 2: Stuart Hall's model of encoding | decoding. Hall ([1973] 1980)

It is clear that the particular vision or intent of a creator does not necessarily flow through to every viewer. The act of creation builds on a series of assumptions such as frameworks of knowledge, relations of production, technical infrastructure. There is the construction of a host of meanings encoded into a work. And when the work is mediated, meaning continues to evolve across the various mediums of dissemination. Put simply - viewers view it, users use it and they go through a process of decoding based on their frameworks of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure. Hall's model speaks to the dynamic and complex model of a contemporary transmedia story system where relationships are formed and insight is gathered in the making of

¹ For a sustained critical analysis on the limitations of the media effects approach, and an active and hopeful approach to new models of understanding of audience see: Gauntlett (2007)

stories, viewings and discussions. Transmedia projects such as *Big Stories*, projects display a relational quality, in particular the capacity for multi-vocality and the significance of social relations in making or sustaining the project. As I note in Potter (2014: 8) the turn towards localised production of everyday experiences combined with the possibility of a global, or at least a globalised, audience can offer the possibility for a radical re-imaging and re-imaging of place and communal identity.

IMAGINED COMMUNITY

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) describes how communities may remotely manifest themselves through shared stories that give rise to shared memory and collective identity. Key to Anderson's argument is that a tapestry of stories defines both community and individual experience, and that communal identification is 'empowering.' Communal identity is embodied in acts of imagination such as images and stories, and shared through various media. Our personal stories and representation may be directly connected to an understanding of collective identity and community. A community's living memory, embodied in individual stories, is its collective identity. This identity is in a state of perpetual flux as the community, like an individual, re-examines their stories and re-defines their identity. An approach to this process of re-examination, that is both participatory and transmedia, can build upon the significance attributed by Berrigan (1979) to self-representation, participation and media democracy where two-way communication, access and participation are considered to be crucial. In addition, such an approach that focuses on communal modes of production across media can fracture the singular narrative of a single imagined community. Instead this approach offers a vision of many and varied imaginings nesting and intersecting across space and time. Fuchs (2002) describes this as a complex dialectical relationship focussed on information flows between the communal and the individual, representing a dynamic that facilitates the constant re-creation of society.

Implicit in this constant re-creation is encouragement of diversity, resulting in the diminishing of centralised authorial control. In terms of *Big Stories*, as the Project developed and showed increasingly complex and dynamic organisational characteristics, a new authorial voice coalesced between the filmmakers' voice and that of participants. Stories became increasingly blended and it became harder to discern which voice was being heard. This coalescence, as the

key example of self-organisation within the project, relates to a key element around the contradictory tensions implicit in the coalescence | divergence of transmedia works.

AGONISTIC PLURALITY: CONTRADICTION AND COALESCENCE

As the *Big Stories* project has developed and shown potential for self-organising and self-sustaining, a new authorial voice has begun to coalesce between the filmmakers' voice and that of the participants. Stories become increasingly blended and it becomes harder to discern which voice is being heard. This synthesis of voices resulting in a new perspective is emblematic of a key idea within the *Big Stories* project, which is that communities are complex; and can have evolving and agonistic viewpoints that can co-exist without having to move to consensus in order for the community to function. Because of the agonistic and complex tendencies of community representation and the potential multiplicity of representation and poly-vocality of the online space, the rational, consensual approach to the public sphere advocated by thinkers such as Habermas ([1962] 1991) and echoed by many contemporary media theorists (including Rheingold, 2008; Dahlgren, 2001) is no longer as relevant when exploring transmedia works. As I point out earlier, transmedia is inherently contradictory. The Habermasian conception is of a consensus for the common good achieved through rational debate that tolerates pluralism of views as long as this is based on some kind of shared reason (Mouffe, 1996: 245). Mouffe instead proposes a project of "radical and plural democracy" that recognises the plurality of views in society defining this as agonistic plurality. This notion is summarised in Potter (2014: 41 – 42) in relation to participatory documentary. I observe that the prime task of agonistic plurality is to mobilise passions towards democratic designs as,

passion and emotional attachment are vital to collective identity formation, as is evident in even cursory examinations of the online fora of shared communities. From the perspective of agonistic pluralism, transforming antagonism into agonism through the provision of channels through which "collective passions will be given ways to express themselves" is the aim of democratic politics and the centre of what Mouffe describes as the site of hegemonic struggle.

In Potter (2014: 43) I note that Couldry (2006) sees an apparent contradiction in Mouffe's idea that empowerment comes through capability over the condi-

tions of self-assertion through sustained communal exposure to moderated conflict. A motivation in the *Big Stories* project has been to explore how individuals or small groups in a community might engage with institutions to create the conditions for such a space of agonistic plurality. This requires looking at how individuals or small groups might transcend external convention as well as their own expectations. The process of producing a space of agonistic pluralism that embodies Mouffe's expectations is not a neat, linear set of affairs. The roughness of human being and feeling cannot be reduced, subsumed or abstracted into neat determinations. Yet this roughness of everyday spatial practices and lived experience is often ignored or made to fit with the dominant discourse – whether this be on media, on culture, or on space. However, it is here in this face-to-face coalescence of co-creativity and the everyday that there exist opportunities for emancipatory potential. The key remains in a mutual recognition of the value of shared stories and sustained relationships between people. When the local stories are produced in an intimate setting with an eye to create works that can move into a broader, global setting that represents an intensification of the experience of the everyday. As I note in Potter (2014: 8) this intensification is an attempt to transform social and creative effort into collective discovery and learning. This interdependent view is connected with a broader thesis about our relations to the institutional and discursive structures we build and inhabit. I would argue that decentring the media-centric reading of transmedia studies begins to address Hay and Couldry's (2011: 479) important point that by placing media at the centre of the world (and the structures in dominance) of theory and analysis we lose the importance of the 'robust' view of mediamaking that emphasises the little, the everyday and the multi-form making and productivity that surrounds media.

CONCLUSION: COALESCED LOCALISED PRODUCTION

In 1953, influenced by the emerging theory of cybernetics and the works of R. Buckminster Fuller, Norbert Weiner and Jay Forrester architect and designer Knud Lonberg-Holm and architect and academic C. Theodore Larson produced a series of graphics designed to illustrate the interrelations of a variety of cultural and social factors, considered essential to the practice of design. The Development Index was intended to be a dynamic screening system to support the organisation of information to management of incoming and outgoing streams of data. The diagram shown in Figure 3 represents an early attempt at

a systems-thinking approach and research tool in order to study interactions of human activity, environmental relations, and communication. It is also a reflection on some of the complexity that exists when seeking to conceptualise frameworks for communal relationships.

community relationships

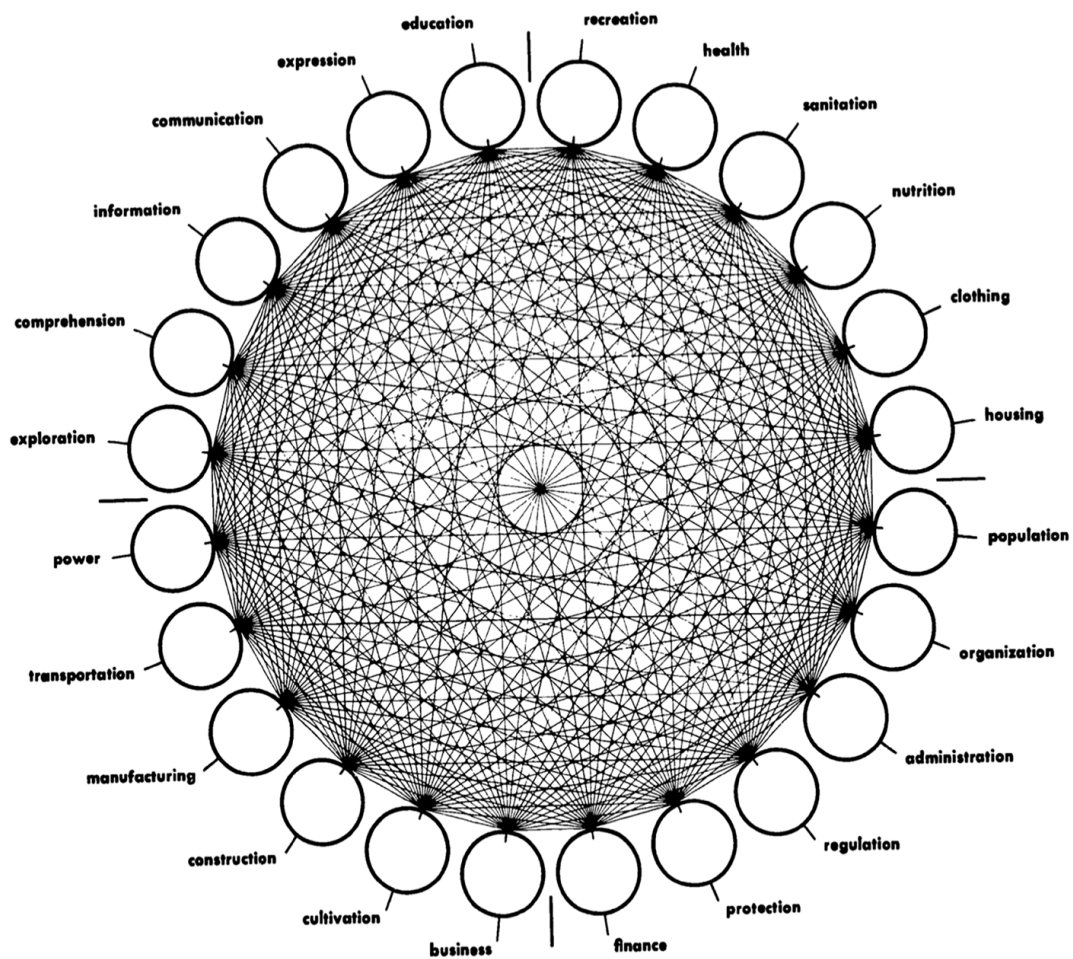


Figure 3: Knud Lonberg-Holm and C. Theodore Larson's diagram of the inter-related factors connected to community relationships, part of the "Development Index" (1953).

While Lonberg-Holm and Larson's model can be interpreted as both reductive and dehumanising, they framed it as a hopeful proposition for organizing and facilitating flows of information in order to foster human development, with particular reference to the development of buildings and communities. The aim of the index was to create a tool that would help designers improve

the built environment. The index was an attempt to manage information flows and to provide relevant data through, what was then, a cutting edge centralised media and technology system. It was the newest of new media. In terms of conceiving transmedia works as a system and looking to this pattern as an early visualisation of a community-based system it may be seen as a visual embodiment of Benkler's notion of new managed system. In Potter (2014: 54) I recount Benkler's (2006, 2011) observations that practices of productive social co-operation enabled through new technologies are proof of the possibilities of human-centric systems and relate these observations to transmedia projects such as *Big Stories*. Benkler notes key hallmarks of such systems:

- (a) location of authority and practical capacity to act at the edges of the system, where potentialities for sensing the environment, identifying opportunities and challenges to action and acting upon them, are located;
- (b) an emphasis on the human: trust, respect, cooperation, judgment, dialogue and empathy;
- (c) communication over the lifetime of the interaction; and
- (d) loosely-coupled systems: systems in which the regularities and dependencies among objects and processes are less strictly associated with each other.

To relate this model to *Big Stories* we see resonance in that the *Big Stories* project emerged from a community based organization (the Media Resource Centre). The project developed principles and a process that reflected the human emphasis and ongoing communication between facilitators and participants. *Big Stories* took place in remote production settings that enabled innovation and thus is a project that is encoded from the edges of our social structures, and is designed around building capacity at the edges of those communities. Finally the project established mechanisms over time that allowed for nimbleness in relation to dealing with changing communal and institutional expectations.

Extending on the fragile notion of transmedia work as a human system, systems theorists such as Waldrop (1992: 255) note that real ecosystems are not totally connected, they are loose and dispersed. In any ecosystem every individual group only interacts with a subset of the total number of other groups, and from these interactions a web-like structure can be said to develop. The same is true of the online environment, with multiple worlds and systems existing. In

this 'web', shaped by multiplicity, interactions are unable to be contained by a universal understanding. This leads into a generally accepted principle of complexity theory that emerges from the study of self-organisation, the notion that information continues to increase, resulting in the system, or interrelated systems, driving toward greater and greater complexity. This raises some important points around designing systems in this environment notably the presence of many, often conflicting perspectives, which I have explored in light of Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism. Transmedia projects such as *Big Stories* draw on a variety of traditions from documentary film, art and photography as a way of recording everyday life through story and as a reflexive interplay between subjects and filmmakers in residence. The incorporation of multiple techniques and distribution models allows for makers and participants to engage in a multiplicity of actions and reflections. Communal identity is embodied in acts of imagination such as images and stories, and shared through various media. This is a complex dialectical relationship focussed on the information flows between the social and the individual, representing a dynamic that facilitates the constant re-creation of society.

The turn to localised production is therefore one step towards reflecting a hyper-local dynamic network that features a high magnitude of contact among many modes and both interactive and iterative behaviour. A collective identity and living memory of the community who tell and share and change these stories is woven together from these stories. As I observe in Potter (2017) there is a tradition of engaged, dialogic practice there is a pathway towards overcoming these obstacles. This alternative path highlights production processes that are not completely dependent on the displacement of individual agency by hierarchical production systems, reflecting Hay and Couldry's challenge to focus the little, the everyday and the multi-form making and productivity that surrounds media in order to maintain a 'robust' view of media.

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CV

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